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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: PROTEST REGARDING COMMENTS ON SARSENBAIULY INVESTIGATION

REF: ALMATY 795

¶11. (U) Summary: A group of ten to twelve demonstrators gathered outside Embassy Almaty on March 13 to protest the Ambassador's March 7 comments on the Sarsenbaiuly murder investigation. One of Sarsenbaiuly's sisters took part in the event. The protest was peaceful and the protesters dispersed after passing on their petition for the Ambassador. End summary.

Remarks

¶12. (U) On March 7, the Ambassador held a press conference in Astana during which he took question on the Sarsenbaiuly murder and the FBI's role in the investigation. Radio Svoboda posed the opening question regarding the FBI's role in the murder investigation. In response, the Ambassador stated that the FBI was cooperating closely with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which has been "completely open and accessible to our FBI colleagues." He added that "the conclusion of the FBI so far is that the investigation has been played out in a very professional manner, and that the investigation has been very thorough, and they have done the kinds of things that any investigative agency would do when faced with challenges of this nature."

¶13. (U) As a follow up, an Interfax correspondent asked whether this implied that the Ambassador agreed with the official explanation incriminating the former head of the Senate Administration Utembayev and several individuals associated with the KNB, but no prominent politicians. The Ambassador responded, "We do not have any reason at this point to doubt the facts that have been presented as to the involvement of the 10 people who are now in custody. I think it is not at all a secret that there are many questions and much speculation, particularly about the motivation that has been announced in connection with the confession of Mr. Utembayev. And it is particularly this aspect of the investigation that the FBI personnel that are coming to Kazakhstan will be focusing their efforts on, together with the ministry."

Protest

¶14. (U) On March 13 at approximately 11:30 AM, a group of ten to twelve members of the Kazakhstan Workers' Movement gathered to protest what they characterized as a statement of support by the

Ambassador for the official investigation results. POEC intern and POL FSN were dispatched to receive the protestors' petition. Two journalists from the local K Plus satellite television station covered the event, although it was not widely reported in the press. Several members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' security service were also present.

15. (U) Movement leaders Semyen Grabovskiy and Sakhib Zhanabayeva expressed their indignation at the Ambassador's remarks and the U.S. role in Kazakhstan and Iraq. They presented a petition addressed to the Ambassador which claimed that America's reputation had been stained and demanded the Ambassador's removal from Kazakhstan. The protest was peaceful. Only Sarsenbaiuly's sister became emotional and addressed Embassy representatives heatedly. In all, the protest lasted no more than one hour.

Comment

16. (SBU) Comment: The Kazakhstan Workers' Movement represents a small segment of the local political landscape and consists mostly of older, communist-leaning pensioners. Contacts in the opposition describe them as a fringe group. Nevertheless, their protest reflects dissatisfaction among at least certain segments of the Kazakhstani population with the GOK's official explanation of Sarsenbaiuly's murder. End comment.

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